



## Becoming Family by mugglemom2

**Category:** Stranger Things, 2016

**Genre:** Romance

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Eleven/Jane H., J. Hopper, Mike W., Will B.

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2018-04-16 09:28:37

**Updated:** 2019-07-01 13:16:18

**Packaged:** 2019-12-12 18:40:58

**Rating:** T

**Chapters:** 12

**Words:** 21,527

**Publisher:** [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

**Summary:** This is a continuation of my first story, The Snowball Effect. This story begins halfway through the party's freshman year of high school. Canon pairings, light romance, family situations, general fluff. Thank you for reading! Please review :)

# 1. Chapter 1

**Please review, if you enjoy what you read, thank you so much!**

"I have a bad feeling about this," Will said nervously, his eyes darting between his friends. He pulled his jacket around his body and shivered, breath visible in the cold air.

"Don't be a wuss," Lucas retorted, lightly punching Will's arm. Will chanced a look at his stepsister Jane, to see if she was still going along with this crazy idea. She looked uncertain but was generally agreeable to anything the rest of the party wanted to do, especially if Mike was on board. And he was definitely on board with their current brush with rebellion.

It was Christmas break of their freshman year in high school. Jane had enrolled when school started, and her dad had married Will's mom the Saturday before Thanksgiving. It had been an exciting and eventful semester for them all, navigating the beginnings of high school together. They viewed their present activity as a rite of passage, one they wanted to experience as a group. So they'd chosen a time a few days before Christmas when the whole party was together without any adults at home. Which had taken some convincing in the first place.

"Please, Hop?" Will had asked at dinner two nights before. "We're just going to hang out here and play games and watch movies and stuff. Max is in California visiting her dad till after Christmas so Lucas is all mopey." It was fine with Hopper for Will and Jane to stay home alone, they did most days after school until their parents got home from work. But the prospect of an entire day and adding three other teenagers, including his daughter's boyfriend, had the chief's brow furrowed in doubt.

"Will you be around, Jonathan?" Hopper asked. The older boy still lived at home but he went to the community college in the mornings and delivered pizzas in the evenings to save up money. He also picked up work as a freelance photographer at weddings and other events. His plan was to do that for two years and hopefully save enough to go away to school for his final two years of college.

Hopper had told him they would match whatever he saved. Jonathan's packed schedule meant he wasn't home much and when he was, he was usually studying. His head snapped up from his plate at hearing his name and he frowned nervously.

"Nancy gets home tomorrow and she's only in town for two weeks..." Please don't ask me to spend one of my precious few days with Nancy babysitting, he thought to himself.

"Relax, son," Hopper chuckled. "I'm not saying you'd have to be here the whole time. Just maybe check in on things at some point during the day? Make sure the Wheeler kid isn't being inappropriate with your sister?"

"Dad!" Jane said incredulously. Will stifled a laugh.

Jonathan looked relieved and said agreeably, "Sure, we can do that."

"I think it's alright, honey," Joyce said to her husband, patting his hand.

"I could have Harrington drive by a few times too," Hopper said, nodding slightly. Will and Jane exchanged a hopeful glance. It sounded like he was about to give his permission.

"Dustin will love that," Will added, smiling. "He says you keep Steve too busy."

Hopper snorted in laughter at Dustin's assessment. "Harrington is a good cadet." Steve was a cadet at the police academy, and Hopper's unofficial personal assistant. The chief used Steve's affection for Dustin and the rest of the party to his advantage, often having Steve help out with driving the teenagers places and even helping them with schoolwork in the afternoons.

So Hopper had agreed, to the delight of Jane and Will, who had radioed the rest of the party after dinner to tell them the good news. It was during the course of that conversation that the plan was hatched to dabble with some minor teenage rebellion during their upcoming day of independence. Will was the one who had taken some convincing, knowing if they got caught, they could say goodbye

to anymore days like this. And possibly to their parents' trust. In the end, he had agreed the plan was basically harmless and seemingly foolproof. Jane had remained silent, nodding her hesitant agreement even though the rest of the party wasn't there to see it. Her communication skills had improved vastly in the previous two years but she still relied on nodding or shaking her head when she was nervous.

Now they stood in a circle after walking a bit into a wooded area behind Will and Jane's house for privacy, coming to a stop after a few minutes so they wouldn't get lost, the house still in their line of sight behind the trees.

"Look, don't you think it's smart for the first time we do this to be together? I mean, what if we get invited to a real high school party and we look like total dweebs because we've never done it before?" Dustin asked, pleased with himself for coming up with such impressive reasoning.

"We ARE total dweebs, in case you hadn't noticed," Will said with a roll of his eyes. "And who's going to invite us to a party, anyway?"

"Are we doing this or what?" Mike asked, growing impatient. "We're standing around here. Let's get it over with." With that, he held out his hand in front of Will. Will sighed and reached into his pocket.

The cigarettes were slightly bent from being hastily shoved into Will's pocket after he'd swiped them that morning. He had made a point of taking a few from each parent's pack so it wasn't noticeable. Hopper and Joyce were making an effort to reduce their smoking habit since the wedding, knowing it was unhealthy and a bad influence on the kids. Still, old habits are hard to break and they each kept a pack handy. The whole family pretty much knew Hopper probably chain smoked while at work, though he and Joyce both had cut back on indulging while at home. They usually just smoked one or two on the porch after dinner.

"And?" Dustin asked expectantly. "Unless Jane can light them with her mind, we're missing something."

Another huff from Will as he produced a silver lighter from his other

pocket.

"Check this out," Dustin added proudly, pulling two cans of beer from his own coat pockets and one from behind his back. "May as well do it all since we're here."

"Aw, hell," groaned Will, uncharacteristically swearing. "Where'd you get that?"

"Duh, from your fridge, five minutes ago," Dustin said, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

"If we get busted, we're gonna be in so much trouble," Will mumbled, looking at the contraband he was still holding.

"How are we gonna get caught?" Dustin challenged. "Your parents are at work. Jonathan and Nancy are Christmas shopping. Steve just left so we know he won't be back soon. He wouldn't tell anyway. We're standing in the woods with no one around. It's the perfect time."

Mike took a deep breath, steeled his resolve, and grabbed one cigarette and the lighter from Will. His hand had moved quickly, as if he may lose his nerve if he hesitated. He brought the cigarette to his lips and lit it, holding it awkwardly. He was certainly glad they weren't currently at some cool high school party, because he knew it would be obvious he had no clue what he was doing. Once Mike took his first good drag on the cigarette, he broke out into a coughing fit. The others laughed, Mike's discomfort cutting through the tension. After catching his breath, Mike too dissolved into laughter, which lead to more coughing. The rest of the party snatched a cigarette and lit theirs in turn, Mike's experience fueling their courage to try it too. Jane was the last one to get hers lit, Mike having to help her.

"So, think we look cool?" Lucas asked, letting the cigarette dangle from his lip like he'd seen tough guys in movies do.

"You look like an idiot, actually," Dustin commented, puffing a cloud of smoke into the air.

"Me?!" Lucas replied. "Whatever, you're not even inhaling."

"Yes I am!" Dustin retorted, though in truth he wasn't sure. "Here,

since you're such a stud, take a swig of this," and he popped open one of the beers and passed it to Lucas.

"Now I bet I look way older, don't I?" Lucas challenged, taking a big sip of the beer while holding his cigarette in his other hand.

"Not really," Jane said, always honest to a fault. She took another beer, which Mike had just opened, and chanced a hesitant sip. She immediately sputtered and wiped her mouth.

"That," she said, pointing to the can, "is nasty."

Mike took it from her, grimaced while a large gulp went down, and pronounced, "It's not that bad."

"Really?" Will challenged, laughing. "'Cause you look like you're about to puke." The cans of beer were passed around the circle of friends, until all three were almost empty. By now they all held a lit cigarette, practicing exhaling and trying to blow smoke circles. Most of the time they were doubled over, either from laughing or coughing or a combination of both. They'd settled into comfortable conversation about everyone's plans for the rest of the break, feeling relaxed and free.

The party was so busy laughing, coughing, and trying not to show how sick they each were starting to feel, they failed to see a familiar car pull into the driveway, or the young man in a blue police cadet uniform and an oversized coat that had "Hawkins PD" emblazoned across the back. The figure quietly made its way through the trees toward the group, following the sound of guffaws and the sight of smoke curling into the air. He carefully watched his step, not wanting to alert them to his presence until he appeared directly in front of their gathering, causing all five teens to scream in surprise.

"Are you shitheads serious right now?" Steve asked, shaking his head in disbelief. "Are you really this stupid?"

## 2. Chapter 2- Busted

Thanks everyone for reading. Oh, our party is busted...Reviews are better than Eggos!

"Hey, buddy," Dustin greeted Steve with a shaky smile.

Steve sighed and held out his hands. "Give 'em here." The cans had been going around the group, but it was Dustin, Mike, and Jane who were each holding one at the moment. They slowly handed them to Steve, who was surprised to find the cans empty.

"Hmmm. Three beers. Five scrawny freshmen. I bet the combo of that and the smokes have you guys feeling a buzz." Jane looked confused, not knowing that term. But she did feel tingly and for some reason everything up until the current moment had been hilariously funny. She figured that's what he was talking about.

"And pretty soon, you'll be feeling like crap. Which serves you right." Steve had put two of the beer cans on the ground and stomped them flat to make them easier to carry. He held out the third, saying, "Here's your ashtray."

They took turns dropping the cigarette butts into the can.

"You're not gonna, ya know, tell, are you?" Mike asked tentatively.

Dustin snorted, "Of course not. Steve's not like that."

Steve's eyebrows shot up as he regarded Dustin. "Hold on. I know I'm your friend but the chief is my boss. What would he say if he'd come home to find you all, including his daughter, out here acting like the Marlboro man?"

"Well, he'd kill us," Dustin answered. "But you're not him..."

"Then you're damn lucky it was me that drove up just now and not him," Steve snapped. The party took that to mean their secret was safe. Dustin looked vindicated and the others were obviously relieved. There were several deep breaths exhaled, which elicited more coughs.



"I'm not going to rat you out but it's not because you idiots don't deserve to have your asses busted, which you do. I'm not going to tell because Chief Hopper would somehow find a way to make this my fault. He'd be all, 'Harrington, I told you to keep an eye on the kids!' And then he'd have me scrubbing toilets at the jail or directing traffic in the middle of a snowstorm."

Mumbled thanks went around the circle as they all turned and headed toward the house.

"Why'd you come back?" Dustin asked Steve as they walked. "You were just here, like an hour ago."

"Less than an hour actually," Steve said. "After I came and checked in on you guys, I went to the diner to grab some lunch. They have that display case of desserts, you know?"

Dustin nodded, his steps falling right in line with Steve's.

"I finished lunch and had some time before the chief said I had to be back. So I bought brownies for you nerds, to celebrate you finishing your first semester of high school." They had reached the house and Steve stopped at his car. He opened the door, tossed in the flattened beer cans and placed the one containing the cigarette butts in the passenger seat.

"I was bringing these to you dumb asses," he said, retrieving a white bakery box from his car and handing it to Dustin.

"You, you bought these for us?" Dustin stammered. He felt awful, a mix of guilt and nausea threatening to overtake him.

"Yep," came the simple reply.

"I'm sorry, dude," Dustin said, his eyes on the ground. "We just wanted to know what it was like."

"I get that, buddy. I just wish you had asked me."

"Would you have let us?" Dustin asked.

"Probably not," he laughed. "But I would have been a lot more cool

about it than your parents would have been."

"Thanks for not telling on us," Dustin said sincerely.

"Like I said, it's purely out of covering my own ass, kid."

Dustin knew that was true but he also knew Steve had a soft spot for the party. He wouldn't want to see them get in trouble, even if they did deserve it. Steve got in the car and waved bye. With a snicker, he told the teenagers he would dispose of the evidence and they were grateful.

For the remainder of the afternoon, the group played games and watched a movie, none of them talking much. No one wanted to admit how uncomfortable they felt, stomachs roiling and coughs occasionally slipping out. The brownies remained untouched. One by one, Dustin, Lucas, and Mike all biked home. Hopper and Joyce were surprised to find only their own children at home when they returned from work. They'd expected to walk in to a loud house full of energetic teenagers. Instead they came in to see Will and Jane on the couch, both looking a bit green.

"How was your day?" Joyce asked.

"It was good," Will said, mustering all the enthusiasm he could.

"Yeah, we had fun," Jane added.

Joyce cut her eyes to Hopper, who was taking off his hat and coat. She had a feeling something was off.

He picked up on her concern and reaching over to feel her forehead, asked Jane, "Do you feel okay? You're awfully quiet."

"I'm okay. Just tired. Long day."

Joyce had gotten up and gone into the kitchen to start dinner. She peered into the bakery box on the counter.

"Where'd the brownies come from?" She called.

"Steve brought them to us," Will explained. "To celebrate our first

semester of high school."

"And you guys didn't eat them?" Joyce asked in disbelief.

"Um, we were waiting till after dinner," Will said, hoping his mom would believe the lie. The truth was that just looking at the brownies had made them all feel like throwing up.

"That's a first," Joyce mumbled.

A short time later, the four of them sat down to dinner. Jonathan was working at the pizza place. Joyce had made spaghetti, which Will was slowly forcing down. Jane was not being as successful. She took one bite, her face froze in horror, and realizing what was about to happen, she bolted from the table, running to the bathroom. She made it just in time. Joyce came in right behind her, rubbing her back and wiping her head with a wet washcloth when she was finished.

"Come lay down, sweetie," she said. "You must have a stomach bug. I could tell you didn't feel good."

She helped settle Jane on the couch with a blanket over her. Jane closed her eyes, hoping the sick feeling would be passed her now that her stomach was empty.

Will too had left the table. He was now sitting on the end of the couch, feet on the coffee table, head back and eyes closed. Jane was stretched out, feet on Will's lap.

"Seems odd for them both to be sick. They were fine this morning," Joyce wondered as she and Hopper were cleaning the kitchen. Of course her boys had shared illnesses many times over the years, but not simultaneously. Usually one would get sick, then the other would catch it. It seemed strange for two kids to get sick at the exact same time.

The dishes put away, Joyce went to the living room to check on their patients.

"How's everyone in here?" Joyce asked softly.

"Feel a little better," Jane mumbled.

Will said, "I'm okay Mom. I'm not sick." Joyce knew her son, and normally he would have been telling her all about his day with his friends. She was about to ask if he might feel nauseated too, but Hopper called to her, "Honey, have you seen my lighter?"

Will's eyes popped wide open as he inhaled sharply. Joyce hadn't noticed, her attention turned to Hopper. She had rejoined him in the kitchen, where he was opening drawers and looking under the table.

"The silver one?" She asked.

"Yeah, the silver one with the H engraved on it. I can't find it," Hopper replied, now glancing around the living room. "My dad gave it to me as a wedding present."

"I remember," Joyce nodded, walking toward their bedroom to look there.

Will banged on Jane's blanket covered legs frantically to get her attention. She opened one eye and looked at him with an annoyed expression. "What?" She asked.

"Your dad's lighter," he whispered, panic filling his voice. "They're looking for it and I don't remember what I did with it earlier."

"You sure?" She asked, not wanting to think it could be lost.

Will screwed his eyes shut, trying to remember the last time he'd seen the lighter. "I remember I had it, you know..."

She nodded. "Then Steve showed up and I don't know what I did with it."

"Maybe in your pocket?" Jane wondered.

Will hurried to find the jacket he'd been wearing, his hands feeling in the pockets. When his parents came down the hall, he dropped the jacket as if it were on fire.

"What are you doing?" Joyce asked.

Will began scanning the room and turning in a circle. Smooth move, he thought to himself sarcastically.

"Helping you look," Will replied. "Could you have left it at the station? Or in your truck?" He asked Hopper with a tone of hopefulness. If his stepdad thought that was a possibility, it could buy Will enough time to find the lighter tomorrow.

"No," the chief responded with a shake of his head. "I never take it out of the house for this reason. Was afraid I'd lose it at the station or out on a call. I only use it here."

The pit in Will's stomach felt like a rock. He returned to the couch, making a show of pretending to search in the cushions. Nudging Jane, he spoke under his breath, his voice hitching, "I must have dropped it in the woods. Probably when Steve showed up. What are we going to do?"

"Don't know," she admitted honestly. Her stomach was churning and her chest hurt from coughing and heaving. Her eyes were tightly shut, as if she could block out this whole day from her memory.

"You're a lot of help," he grumbled crossly, not realizing his mom was standing directly behind him.

"Hey, that's not necessary," Joyce scolded. "And why are you so concerned about Hop's lighter?"

Will jumped at the sound of her voice, wondering how much she heard.

Once again, Hopper's voice from the kitchen saved Will from further questioning by his mother.

"Joyce, come split this last beer with me. Bring your lighter on the porch. Let's relax a little then resume the search. Funny, I thought we still had several beers left or I would have stopped on the way home and gotten some, but there's only one in here. It's okay, we can share it," he said, not appearing too concerned.

Will flopped back down, looking up at the ceiling. He couldn't believe Dustin had only left one beer in the refrigerator. How dumb could

someone be... He let out a frustrated sigh, fists pushed against his eyes.

Joyce's eyes narrowed as she watched her son, mother's intuition giving her a nagging feeling in the back of her mind. Several factors were sending off red flags, and she didn't like where they were leading her.

"Is there anything I should know?"

"Huh?" Will sat up with a jolt. Oh God, he thought, his heart sinking into his stomach. His mother was standing over him, her arms crossed.

Hopper turned just as he was about to step out onto the porch. "What's going on?"

"I'm not sure," Joyce began, "But I think these two may need to tell us something."

Hopper sat in his chair, next to the couch and nudged Jane's shoulder. She had her eyes closed, faking sleep, which her dad saw right through.

"Sit up, kid."

She slowly opened her eyes and looked at Will as she scooted into a halfway sitting position.

"Mom, there's nothing to tell," Will muttered, not making eye contact with anyone in the room. Don't ever play poker, or at least not with me, his mom thought to herself. His face gave away a lie every time.

"You sure about that?" Joyce replied.

Hopper sighed and fixed Jane with a glare. She squirmed under his gaze.

"Spill it. What is it you don't want us to know?"

Jane pulled the blanket up over her face with a groan. Will decided their parents weren't going to let this go, and they may as well fess

up. He hated it, knowing he was about to disappoint them, also knowing punishment would surely follow. Prolonging it wouldn't help matters any.

"I might know where your lighter is," he admitted quietly.

"How would you know that?" Joyce asked.

"We, uh, kinda borrowed it."

The words felt thick in his mouth, a lump in his throat.

"You borrowed it," Hopper repeated, expressionless. Both teens nodded.

"So, whatever you're about to tell us, it was both of you, I take it? And your friends too?" He asked. Another pair of nodding heads in response.

"Um, Hop, we'll tell you, but will you, uh, please not tell their parents? I don't want to be a snitch," Will pleaded.

"Can't promise that, sorry," Hopper replied with a shake of his head. "I have to have all the facts. And if it's something their parents need to know, I've got to tell them. Keep talking."

Will was searching for the right words, chewing his fingernail and looking at his lap.

"William Byers," his mom snapped, "Tell us. The whole story." Will jumped slightly at her admonishment, as he was struggling to think of the right words.

"Feel free to help him out, young lady. You are in this too," Hopper said pointedly to Jane. Her eyes grew wide and she glanced briefly at Will. Taking in a deep breath, she confessed, "Used the lighter to try something. Something bad," and she pointed to Hopper's cigarettes on the table by the door.

"You were *smoking*?" Joyce asked, her voice raised. "And that's why you got sick?" Jane nodded, her eyes glued to the floor.

"Not just that," She added, her words barely louder than a whisper. "Beer too."

"*What* in the world were you thinking?!" Hopper was clearly angry. Will and Jane looked miserable, she on the verge of tears and his face riddled with guilt.

"Hop, let's talk about this a minute. Alone," Joyce said. "You two, head to your rooms. We'll be in soon."

"Are we in trouble?" Will asked, getting up slowly and dragging his feet toward the hall to go to his room. This makes me feel about five years old, he thought. He realized what a ridiculous question he had just asked. Naw, you dumbass, he thought to himself, your parents are fine with you drinking and smoking. He wished he had never agreed to his friends' plan.

"Damn right, you are. Your buddies too. Now do what we said and go to your rooms," Hopper stated firmly. "And no chatting with anyone on that radio, you hear me?" Hopper called as an afterthought to Will's retreating form.

"Yes, sir," came Will's hasty response.

The two teens halted at their respective bedroom doors, across the hall from each other. Will shared a room with Jonathan but he wasn't home much.

"Hey, Will?" Jane asked as she was about to open her bedroom door.

"Yeah?" He answered, hand on his door knob too.

"I'm glad you're my brother now."

"Even when we're both in trouble?"

"Yes," she replied emphatically. "It's nice. Not being the only kid."

"I'm glad too, sis," he said with a smile. "It's cool to have someone my own age around."

"What are the grown ups talking about?" She asked, bottom lip



between her teeth, chancing a quick look over her shoulder.  
"Consequences?"

"Ugh, I'm sure," he said with a nod. "They're probably coming up with new and creative punishments, considering what we did."

Their conversation came to an abrupt stop when Joyce called from the living room, "I'd better not hear any talking from back there!"

Will and Jane scrambled into their rooms, closing the doors behind them.

### 3. Chapter 3- Talks

Jim and Joyce Hopper stood on their front porch, passing a can of beer between them, each smoking a cigarette, neither saying anything for a few moments. Joyce was the first to break the silence. "We need to get the facts from the kids before calling the other parents, I guess."

"Yeah, I figured that's why you sent them to their rooms, so we can talk to them separately and see if their stories match," Hopper replied with a small grin. "Pretty smart detective work, like a true cop's wife."

"Well, now we know why there was only one beer in the fridge, though we don't know where your lighter is. I hope they didn't lose it. I still think of Will as a little kid, even after all he's been through," she said, shaking her head. Hopper's arm was around her shoulder and she leaned into his chest. "Of course, here we are drinking and smoking. Are we a bad influence on our own kids?" She asked, craning her neck to look up at him.

"Don't start blaming yourself. Or me, for that matter. Kids are going to try stuff like this, especially teenagers. I was younger than them when I first swiped a few smokes from my dad. I think I was 12 or 13."

"You were quite the rule breaker as I recall," she laughed. "And what did my new father-in-law do when he discovered what you'd done?" Hopper winced slightly at the memory then broke into a grin. "He told me if I ever tried it again, he'd make me smoke the whole pack. He also made sure I wasn't sitting comfortably for a day or so."

Joyce chuckled and he made a point of acting offended. Time to throw her under the bus, he thought. "I seem to remember my dear wife being no saint in high school. You used to bum cigarettes off me all the time between classes."

"Well, I knew you'd give them to me. You were contributing to my delinquency!"

"Say what you want, Mrs. Hopper. You had your own delinquent

tendencies without my help," he teased, poking her side so she laughed out loud.

"What are we going to do with those two delinquents?" She asked, letting out a deep breath and turning her gaze back to the house.

"Let them sweat it out, like we do perps in holding cells," he replied, keeping his expression completely serious. Joyce's eyebrows shot up and the corners of his mouth twitched. She smacked his chest.

"You almost had me going there! Not nice, Chief."

"Come here," he whispered, pulling her close and encircling her in her arms.

"I was just trying to make you feel better. It's all going to be okay, you know that, right?"

She nodded against his body, breathing in his familiar scent relaxing her.

"I think this is the first time the kids have really done anything wrong since we got married, besides little stuff," she realized. "They sure know how to do it up right. Smoking AND drinking. I can't believe it," she muttered into his shirt, shivering in the cold and getting as close to him as possible.

"And to think, I was worried about Wheeler and Jane having their hands all over each other. I didn't see this one coming either." His chin was resting on her head and he thought if it weren't so cold, and they didn't have the current situation to address, he'd be quite content to stand there for hours.

"Come on, let's go in," he pronounced, reluctantly pulling out of the embrace. "Time to face our rebels."

He opened the door, holding it to let her walk in first. They paused just inside the house, stopping to listen for any sounds coming from the bedrooms down the hall.

"You go ahead," she began, "I need to get out of these work clothes and get comfortable."

"I'm going to talk to Will if that's alright with you. After you change you can talk to Jane. We'll compare what they say and decide what to do from there."

"Good plan," she agreed, kicking off her shoes and starting to unbutton her shirt as she headed into their bedroom.

Hopper knocked once lightly on Will's door, listening for the soft "Come in," he heard.

Will was sitting on his bed, comic book on his lap, a look of surprise on his face when Hopper walked in. He'd been expecting his mom. He took a deep breath, wondering if this meant he was in even more trouble than he'd originally thought. Was that even possible?

"Hi," he said anxiously. "I thought you were Mom."

"Oh she'll be talking to you too. My turn first, okay?"

Will nodded, his fingers playing with the edges of the comic book. This was uncharted territory, having a stepfather in the role of parent. His own father had left discussions like this to Joyce, as much as Will could remember. It didn't take long for Hopper to pick up on Will's nervousness. He was torn between feeling bad for the kid and being angry at the choices he, Jane, and their friends had made that day.

Will's quiet voice broke the silence, his eyes boring into the comic book, not that he was reading it.

"I'm, uh, really sorry about your lighter. I'll work to buy you another one, or uh..." In truth, he had no idea how much something like that cost. The knowledge that this particular lighter probably had sentimental value had him feeling even worse. It had been a gift from Hopper's dad. Could he even replace it, if by chance he could save enough money? A lump appeared in his throat. He forced himself to choke it back, not wanting to look like a complete baby in front of Hopper, who seemed to Will as tough as they come. Rationally, he knew Hopper had seen him screaming and crying before but that was different, when he wasn't even himself. Tonight felt raw, exposed, the room felt strangely empty, just him and Hopper. His face blushed

with embarrassment.

"So, uh, maybe I could go look for it, it may be in the, um, woods, kinda, you know, behind the house. I could take a flashlight..."

"Whoa, slow down and take a breath," Hopper said, holding up a hand to halt Will's nervous rambling. "You know I'm more worried about you than I am the lighter, right?"

Will's gaze finally left the comic book, looking up at the man for the first time since he'd entered the room. "Huh? I mean, sir?"

"The lighter is just a thing. You're my kid," Hopper declared, the finality of his statement threatening the lump in Will's throat to take over.

"But I'm not, I mean, you're not my..." Will stammered.

"I'm not Jane's biological father, but she's my daughter, right?"

"Yeah but you adopted her. You and my mom haven't even been married that long. I didn't know you thought of me as, you know..."

"As my kid? Well I do." Once again, it was stated so matter of factly, Will almost didn't believe what he was hearing. Hopper had to be the coolest stepdad ever.

"Now. Tell me what you all got up to today. I need to hear it all." And we're back to that, Will's internal monologue resumed. So much for the cool stepdad part. This wasn't going to be fun. He didn't even know where to start. The tears were barely being kept at bay.

"You already know," he mumbled, the words barely audible. He really didn't want to share all the details.

"Oh no, you're not getting off that easy."

Will sighed and lay back on his pillow, throwing an arm over his eyes. Hopper patted his wrist and said, "Your mom and I haven't talked about punishments or anything. Yet. But you know we can't just let this one go. Being honest now may help your case," he added, hoping to encourage Will to open up.

Will just groaned. "I am being honest. There's not much to tell. You know what we did."

Hopper decided to pursue a more direct line of questioning.

"Where did the cigarettes come from?"

"You. And Mom."

"You took them?" No response but a muffled moan from the bed. I'll try this one more time, Hopper thought. "Will. You took them?"

"Yes, sir," he whispered.

"Okay. What about the beer?"

"They came from our fridge but I didn't take them. That was someone else. We all, you know, had some though." He hoped and prayed Hopper didn't ask who that someone was. He'd already rattled out the whole party, he didn't want to name specifics. Hopper didn't ask, thankfully.

"Whose idea was all this?"

"Kind of everyone's. You probably won't believe me but I didn't want to do any of it. Not at first."

"I see. And I do believe you. What about Jane?"

"She went along with it but I don't think she really wanted to either."

"Did you say you went in the woods behind the house?"

Will nodded, a stray tear slipping out.

"Jesus, you all could have started a fire or God knows what else." Seeing how miserable Will looked, he stopped himself from speculating further on what could have happened.

"Alright, one more important question. You kids weren't smoking anything out there besides cigarettes, were you?"

Will looked momentarily confused, not understanding the question at

first, then when the realization hit, he sat upright, shaking his head, "No, sir!"

Hopper let out a relieved breath. "Whew, okay. I think that's enough for tonight. I need to talk to your mom. Go on and take a shower and get ready for bed."

Any other night, he would have pointed out that it wasn't even 9:00 and it was Christmas vacation. He stayed up later than that on school nights. He wanted to remind Hopper that he was 14, not 8, but thought better of it. He had enough sense to not say anything.

Hopper closed Will's door, and heard Joyce on the phone in the kitchen. He followed the sound of her voice and sat down on the couch.

"Thanks, Karen. Yes I hate it too..."

Joyce waved at Hopper as she was saying goodbye, then joined him in the living room. She was wearing pajamas and a bathrobe, looking far more comfortable than he, still in his uniform.

"How did it go with Jane?" He asked her when they were settled on the couch, her snuggled up next to his side.

"She was crying, but had stopped when I left. She feels really bad about what they did," Joyce answered.

"Yeah, she always does when she gets in trouble. I just wish they would think about that *before* doing stupid stuff like this. Will was beating himself up too. He was worried about my lighter, when all I could picture was them setting fire to the woods!" He told her, shaking his head.

"Did he say who took the beer and where the cigarettes came from? Jane just said it was all of them."

"Will swiped the smokes from you and me. He wouldn't tell me who got the beer. These kids are nothing if not loyal. Did Karen know?"

"No, she said Mike hadn't felt like eating dinner but she had no idea what they'd done until I told her. When she hung up she was going to talk to him. She was as shocked and angry as us, of course. She

offered to call the other two parents."

"I bet it won't be a pleasant night for any of our kids' friends," he said, chuckling. Then he brought his hand to rub his forehead and asked, "So, what are we going to do with our two? Any ideas?"

Down the hall, Will had paused after coming out of the bathroom, post shower, leaning his head out to try and hear his parents' conversation. He wanted to go in there and ask them something but had stopped himself. He'd been sent to his room, and his stepdad had told him to shower and go to bed. That probably meant it wasn't a good idea to eavesdrop or show up in the living room in the middle of their conversation. Something was bugging him though and he really wanted to ask. He stayed rooted where he stood and called, "Mom? Can I come in there a minute?"

"Sure, honey," she replied.

"You don't have to ask to come talk to us," Hopper told him when he appeared in front of them. "Your room isn't a cell."

Will gave a slight smile and cleared his throat before saying shyly, "I kind of guess that I'll be grounded tomorrow."

"I'd say that's a safe bet," his mother nodded. "And not just tomorrow. But go on, what did you want to ask us?"

Will suppressed a groan at her pronouncement and continued, "I was wondering if I can look for Hop's lighter tomorrow? I can try to retrace our steps and find it. But technically I'd have to leave the house to do that. I wouldn't go anywhere else though. I just really want to find it."

The parents shared a knowing look. Hopper spoke, "I'll go out there with you in the morning before I go to work and we can look together, okay?"

"Okay," Will said. "And I'm really sorry about what we did."

"We know, sweetie," Joyce said, standing up to hug Will.

"Are me and Jane gonna be grounded a long time? It's Christmas



break. Mike was working on a D&D campaign, we had all sorts of cool stuff planned..." He had his head buried in her shoulder. Maybe she'll go easy on us, he thought. Please, Mom...

"You're definitely in trouble and you know it. Hop and I haven't talked about specifics but I don't think you need to worry about all those big plans you've made. They're not happening, for at least a week."

"Mo-om," he whined. "We won't ever do it again."

"Good but that doesn't change the punishment. Go to bed. I love you." And with that, she turned him toward the hall and sent him in the direction of his room, his shoulders slumped in defeat.

## 4. Chapter 4- One AM

**I must admit, this chapter was really fun to write! Those of you asking for more Mileven, here ya go. With some humor thrown in. There will be more Mileven in coming chapters too. Enjoy. Please, please review, dear readers! There weren't any reviews for chapter three, sniff, sniff.**

"Will, are you there? Come in, over." The supercom's scratchy transmission did nothing to rouse the sleeping figure next to it.

"Will, wake up, come on. Wake up. Will! Over."

The boy rolled over, thinking he must be dreaming or hearing voices in his sleep. He was vaguely aware of it happening again, disturbing his very pleasant dream involving Princess Leia.

"Will! Wake up and answer. Over."

Groaning and rubbing his eyes, he focused on the clock next to his bed. 1:15. Ignoring the radio apparently wasn't making the source of the noise stop. The crackle once again broke through the quiet stillness of his room.

"Will! Are you there? Over."

"Mike, what the hell?" Will grumbled. "Are you really calling me in the middle of the night? What if my folks hear?! In case you didn't know, I'm grounded 'cause of what we did today," he whispered forcefully into the radio now in his hand.

"Yeah me too but I wanted to check on you. And El. And actually it was yesterday. And you forgot to say over. Over."

"Mike, I'm seriously reconsidering our friendship right now. OVER." He countered as loudly as he dared, still keeping his voice low.

"You don't mean that. Anyway, let me talk to her for a minute. Over."

Rolling his eyes and sitting up slightly in bed, Will realized why Mike had called and who he really was checking on.

"Come on, man. I'd have to go wake her up. If Mom or Hopper hear, I'll be in even more trouble than I already am. You can talk to her tomorrow. Or actually, later today. Over."

"But what if my mom decides to ground me from my supercom too? Lucas's parents took his away for the rest of the Christmas break. This may be my only chance to talk to her for a while. Please, Will. Over." Mike was pleading, on the verge of begging.

"You can call her on the phone then."

Suddenly, another voice startled Will, causing him to jump in surprise. Exactly how many people were going to converse with him right now?!

"Mom and Hop are asleep. I got home about an hour ago and they didn't even hear me come in," Jonathan mumbled from his bed on the other side of the room. "So let Mike talk to Jane and we can all go back to sleep. He's not gonna take no for an answer. I'll cover for you if anyone wakes up."

"Fine," Will snapped, throwing the blankets off and getting out of bed. Relenting did seem to be the best way to get Mike to leave them alone so they could sleep. He opened the door slowly, stopping to listen for any sounds from his parents' room. The house was dead silent except for the faint sound of Hopper's snoring. Sighing, he tiptoed across the hall and into Jane's room.

"Hey, wake up," he whispered, jostling his stepsister. Her cat Snowball opened her eyes before Jane did, giving Will a deadly look and an annoyed meow from her position curled at the end of Jane's bed.

"Oh, zip it," Will hissed. "This wasn't my idea." Here I am at one o'clock in the morning, arguing with a cat, Will thought. The things I do for my friends. The situation would be comical if he weren't half asleep and in a bad mood over the previous day's events. He settled for returning to the task at hand.

"El. Jane, get up," he said again, leaning close to her ear so he could talk above a whisper and hopefully have some success stirring her.

"Hmm?" She mumbled, instinctively swatting at the source of sound in her ear. Her hand made contact with Will's cheek and he resisted the urge to cry out. One more attempt and I'm forgetting this whole thing, he said to himself. He backed away a bit to avoid being hit again.

"Wake up, your boyfriend wants to talk to you," he said more forcefully, shaking her shoulder. One eye opened.

"Huh?" She said in a sleepy voice. "Mike?"

"Unless you have some other boyfriend, yes. Now come in my room and don't make any noise." Jane rolled out of bed, only halfway awake, bleary eyed and confused. Snowball followed her as she usually did, stretching and making her way to her second favorite spot, under the Christmas tree in the living room.

Will climbed back into bed, and Jane sat next to him, scooting him toward the edge with her body. "Make it quick," Will muttered, nestling his face into the pillow and pushing slightly back against Jane's shove. "And keep your voice down."

"Mike?" She said tentatively into the radio, a yawn escaping as she spoke.

"Hey! Are you alright? Sorry to wake you up."

"I'm alright, Mike. But I threw up."

"I'm really sorry you got sick. I felt gross all night too. I just had to know if you were okay."

Will noted to himself that Mike had not apologized to *him* for waking him up nor had he corrected Jane when she didn't say "over." He snickered into his covers, fighting the urge to grab the radio and completely embarrass his best friend and stepsister. In truth he was too tired to fool with it.

"I hope you're not in too much trouble," Mike said sympathetically.

Once again, Will wanted to point out that Mike had not expressed similar concern over *his* punishment.

"Joyce said she and Dad are dis-disappointed. Will and me are grounded. Consequences."

"Do you know how long?" Mike asked, a tinge of hopefulness evident in the question.

"Mom said at least a week," Will offered, his voice gruff with sleepiness. "Is this conversation about over? Because if either of your parents hear you right now, it'll be longer."

"Will is right," Jane said into the radio.

There needs to be more of that being said, Will thought.

"I'm gonna miss you," Mike whispered.

Will groaned, thinking he was about to be the next to throw up.

"Me too, Mike," she responded, cradling the receiver close to her face.

Yep, definitely going to vomit, Will was convinced.

"I'll call tomorrow if I can," Mike said.

Thank God, they're wrapping this up, Will thought.

"I know we shouldn't have done it. Smoking and beer," Jane said, shaking her head.

Will buried his face in the covers and put the pillow over his head. Is she really continuing the discussion now?! They were just about to hang up!

"Yeah, I know. It wasn't our smartest move."

"Sorry we told Dad and Joyce what we did. Will lost Dad's lighter."

Hey, wait a minute, Will thought. Don't make it sound like it's my fault we got busted. He frowned and took the pillow off his face, grabbing the radio out of Jane's hand.

"Um, they may have never known if you hadn't thrown up. That's when Mom first got suspicious," he said, giving Jane a hard glare.

"Don't blame her," Mike countered. "She couldn't help getting sick."

"Hey, Mike, you forgot to say over. Over," Will said sarcastically.

"You three all need to stop talking and go to bed, or I'm going to wake up Mom and Hopper myself and tell them to come in here," came Jonathan's exhausted sounding voice. "I have to get some sleep. I'm taking Santa pictures at Melvald's tomorrow."

Will put the supercom back in Jane's hand with the warning, "If the two of you start making kissing noises, I'm throwing that out the window."

Jane gave him a puzzled look and spoke into the receiver, "Mike, I have to go back to bed."

"Okay, if you have to..." his voice was dangerously close to a full fledged whine.

"Good night, Mike," Jane said around another yawn.

"Night, Jane. I'll try really hard to talk to you tomorrow."

"Technically you mean today, lover boy," Will groaned into his blankets.

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Sunlight streamed in through the window as Will buried himself deeper in the covers. Mike was calling him again and this time he was definitely ignoring it. At least until he was fully awake.

"Will, time to get up," the voice repeated.

"Shut up and leave me alone," Will grumbled, reaching over to try and knock the supercom to the floor. Maybe that would get it to stop interrupting his sleep.

"Excuse me?" The voice asked, sounding irate. He was now seriously thinking of throwing the radio in the trash.

"Ugh, shut up!" Will yelled, his eyes flying open.

As he focused and his vision adjusted to the bright sunlight filling the room, he realized it was not the supercom making any noise at all. It was his stepfather, standing next to his bed, fully dressed in uniform, arms crossed, a scowl on his face.

"Oh, God. I thought you were Mike!" Will wanted to crawl under the covers and bury himself rather than face his blunder.

"Why would Mike be waking you up?" Hopper asked, brows furrowed.

Will gulped. He couldn't very well say it was because they'd had an extended conversation at one o'clock in the morning. "Uh, I thought he was calling on the walkie," he mumbled, gesturing toward the supercom on the floor. "Guess I was dreaming?"

"Huh. It was quite a dream, apparently," Hopper grumbled. "Anyway, you said you wanted to look for my lighter this morning. Now's your chance. I have to leave soon."

"Okay, thanks. And uh, sorry about saying shut up. I really didn't know it was you!"

Hopper's bearded face broke into a grin and he winked.

"Don't worry about it. Just don't make it a habit," he said amiably, reaching out to ruffle Will's hair.

"I won't, I promise," Will nodded, getting out of bed and picking up the supercom from off the floor. Hopper stopped halfway out the door and turned back toward Will, who was now at his dresser retrieving clothes.

"Will, you know I don't care about the lighter, like I told you last night. I mean, it has sentimental value. But it can be replaced. I'm only going out to look for it with you because it was so important to you to try and find it."

The guilt flooded over Will. "I know," he said quietly, his eyes suddenly very interested in his t shirt drawer.

"But you and Jane and your friends can't be replaced. What you did

yesterday was dangerous. I don't want you to think a chunk of silver is more important to me than what could have happened, you know?"

"Yes, sir," Will choked out.

"We've been through too much to have one of you get hurt or worse over a stupid stunt like what you all did yesterday. Your mom and I couldn't take it."

And with that, he left Will's room in search of his morning coffee.



## 5. Chapter 5- Grounded

**This chapter is all family fluffiness. I hope you like this one! Will you do me a favor and leave a review? Thank you!**

"We found it!" Will announced, red cheeked and out of breath from running back to the house. He had flung open the front door and barreled in, forgetting his stepdad was right behind him. Hopper stopped the door from slamming in his face. He was twirling the silver lighter in his fingers as if to prove Will was telling the truth. A light snow had begun to fall, and Hopper paused to stomp it off his boots and brush it from the back of Will's coat.

Joyce wrapped Will in a hug, "I know it was important to you."  
"It was, I mean, it is..." Will's voice trailed off as he returned his mother's embrace.

"Will you tell me why?" She asked softly, not wanting to make him uncomfortable.

Will pulled out of the hug and shrugged while mumbling, "Hop's been so good to me. To us. Then I go and screw up. I wanted to, you know, try to make it right..." He sighed and chanced a look toward Hopper who was gathering his keys and putting on his badge, after placing the lighter carefully in the drawer of the table next to the door.

Hopper gave a slight shake of his head and said, "I told you, son, the real problem was that you could have started a fire or you could have made yourselves sick beyond the one time Jane showed her lack of tolerance for alcohol and cigarettes. It was a stupid thing to do, right Janie? And what do we say? We're..." Hopper's eyes were focused on the figure in the hall, making her way toward the kitchen.

She rubbed her eyes and supplied the anticipated answer, cheeks blushing red with embarrassment. "Not stupid," she mumbled, flopping in a chair at the kitchen table.

Joyce leaned over and kissed her messy curls and asked, "Feel better, honey?"

Jane nodded then decided today was definitely a day to be on her best behavior.

"I feel okay, yes," she answered politely, looking at her dad for approval. He chuckled, knowing she was kissing up by answering in a complete sentence. "Ready for cereal and Eggos. And orange juice," she added, also for her father's benefit.

"Jonathan is already at the store, setting up for Santa pictures, and I need to get going too," Joyce said, pouring coffee into a thermos and handing it to her husband.

"I want to come!" Jane said, perking up at the thought. "Can I bring Snowball? She's never seen Santa. Wouldn't that be fun, Snowball?" The question was addressed to the cat, who had just emerged from her spot under the Christmas tree and was winding through Jane's legs, purring as she rubbed her back against the soft pajama pants.

Hopper gave her a stern look and shook his head. "Nice try, but no way. You and Will are on lockdown. No leaving the house, no visitors."

Will gave a stifled groan of protest from his spot at the table, where he was pouring a bowl of cereal before passing the box to Jane. He knew they were grounded but the reminder of what that meant sounded even worse now. An entire day of Christmas vacation spent stuck inside, with none of their friends able to come over. And he knew the next few days would be more of the same. If my friends suggest an idea again as dumb as drinking and smoking, I'm punching them into sanity, he moaned to himself.

Jane wrinkled her nose and frowned as if she were tasting something bitter. "That sucks. Boring," she stated with a grimace. "What about playing in the snow?!" She acted indignant when that particular realization hit her.

Hopper's eyebrows raised and Will smacked the side of Jane's leg under the table. I've really got to teach her when to keep her mouth shut, he thought, if she hopes to see Mike anytime before high school graduation.

"Being disrespectful isn't wise considering you're already in major trouble, missy," her dad told her pointedly, his finger under her chin, raising her gaze to meet his. Seeing his expression, she realized her mistake and gulped.

"Sorry," she said quietly.

"Next time you think of breaking the rules and doing something dangerous, remember just how boring being grounded is."

Jane nodded reluctantly in understanding, though she looked like she was about to talk back again. Will tried to catch her eye to tell her to hush.

"And don't say sucks," Hopper added as an afterthought.

"Okay, Dad. Sorry," she whined, playing with the spoon in her cereal bowl, sloshing milk onto the table. "Just wanted to take Snowball to see Santa."

"You can explain to Snowball. I'm sure she'll understand," he replied sarcastically. Jane rolled her eyes and let out a huffy sigh.

"And if you're worried about being bored, I'm sure we can make a list of some housework to help you two pass the time, don't you think, honey?" He asked Joyce with a twinkle of amusement in his eye despite his tone being quite serious.

Once again, Jane felt Will hit her thigh and she reached down to rub the spot, giving him a scowl in the process.

"You're about to get us a bunch of chores! You've got to figure out when parents are mad," he hissed under his breath to her. "And then shut up," he whispered.

"I KNOW my dad is mad when he calls me 'missy' or 'young lady.' And it's not nice to say shut up," she retorted in a frustrated whisper, reaching over to smack his leg in the same spot he'd hit her.

"It's not nice for you to get us in more trouble, so zip it," he countered, through clenched teeth.

"That's enough," Joyce announced while putting on her coat. "Before I do start thinking of ways to occupy your day that you won't like." Will threw a look at Jane that clearly said, *see what I mean?* Her only response was to turn so her back was to him.

"Look, Hop, they're really acting like brother and sister," Joyce noted. She didn't want the teens to think she approved of their bickering but the truth was that it warmed her heart. She wanted nothing more than to have this family, an unconventional as it was.

"I see that," he replied. "Whose idea was it to have teenagers the same age?"

"I guess that's you. You proposed," she smiled, reaching up to kiss him goodbye.

"That I did. And I'm glad," he said, lowering his lips to hers briefly.

"Eeww," Will grumbled. "As if we weren't already being punished..."

His parents laughed but otherwise ignored his assessment of their display of affection.

Hopper reached for the front door and held it open for Joyce.

"Do I need to remind you of the rules?" Hopper asked the kids as he was walking out.

"No, sir," Will sighed. How hard was it to remember they couldn't go anywhere or have anyone over or have any fun, apparently.

"No, Dad. We'll be good," Jane answered.

"Don't be surprised if Harrington comes to check on you. He's the only person to open the door for."

"Okay," Jane said, holding Snowball and carrying her dishes to the sink.

"Jonathan may come home around lunchtime but knowing him, he won't be here long. He'll probably go out with Nancy," Joyce added.

Lucky, Will thought, suddenly envious of his older brother's freedom. But he also knew Jonathan worked like crazy to save money and he certainly was in no hurry for that kind of responsibility himself. Will and Jane watched as their parents left for the day, being certain the teens locked the door behind them.

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"Watching 'Sale of the Century,' huh? Looks like an exciting day," Steve snickered when he came to check on them at noon.

"We're bored, if you're wondering," Will said from his spot on the couch. He was passing a Magic 8 Ball back and forth between his hands while Jane changed the TV channel with a flick of her eyes. She settled on the game show and sat up from where she'd been halfway lying down on the couch.

"I figured you were ready to move on from yesterday so I almost brought some whiskey and cigars," Steve said with a chuckle. "But I changed my mind. So, how are you two doing?"

"I wanted to bring Snowball to see Santa," Jane pouted. "Dad said no way."

"No surprise there," Steve replied, not completely without sympathy. "What did you expect they'd do when they found out you were drinking and smoking? Throw you a party?"

"I like parties," Jane mentioned happily. Will rolled his eyes but didn't say anything. He knew she still struggled with understanding sarcasm.

"It's not like we got drunk," Will pointed out. "We didn't even have one beer each."

"Bring that up to your mom and the chief and see if it helps. I'm guessing the whole 'we weren't even drunk' argument won't be successful, though."

"Very funny. Unlike my sister here, I know when to be quiet."

"So do I," Jane replied indignantly.

"Ha! That's a good one," Will laughed. Jane narrowed her eyes at him.

"Steve, it's our duty to impart our wisdom on young Jane here," Will said, eager to have a project. "It will give us something to do too. She clearly needs our guidance. I can give you the perfect example from this very morning."

Jane thought she should disagree, or at least tell Will they were the same age, but the truth was that she *was* a little curious to hear what they could teach her on the subject of parents.

"Okay but make it fast," Steve relented. "I don't want Chief Hopper to chew my ass out if I'm late getting back."

"Alright," Will agreed, nodding and sitting up straight for the important discussion. "So this morning, Hop was telling us not to go anywhere today and all of that. And she," gesturing toward Jane, who was sitting with crossed arms and a dubious expression, not sure where all of this was going, "Tells her dad that's boring. Oh, and that it sucks."

Steve shook his head and inhaled sharply. "Ooh, not smart! You do have a lot to learn."

Jane leaned toward him a bit, eagerly listening. "But is IS boring. And it sucks."

"See, I've been trying to tell her," Will continued. "When you're in trouble, you can't mouth off to grown ups like that. They'll only get madder!"

Jane nodded, brow furrowed in concentration.

"When you said that, they almost gave us a list of chores to do. That would have really sucked, right?"

"Totally," understanding registering on Jane's face. "Don't want more consequences."

"So listen," Will instructed, "Being grounded means you need to be all 'yes, sir and ma'am and I'm sorry,' got it?"

"Got it," she said, nodding fervently. "Anything else?"

"When they get home later, it wouldn't be a bad idea to kiss up," Steve interjected, taking the eight ball from Will's hands and shaking it.

"Good point," Will agreed. "Here's what we mean. When Mom and Hop come home, don't complain about being grounded. Be helpful and polite and stuff. Parents eat that up."

"Definitely don't gripe about being in trouble. Especially since you deserve it," Steve noted.

"God, you're not going to get all lecturing, are you?" Will groaned.

"Me? Hell, no. I pulled lots of crap in high school. Can't say I was drinking and smoking at 14, though."

"You make it sound like we're fried all the time. We tried it ONCE and believe me, we won't be doing it anytime again soon," Will clarified.

"Yuck, no. That was nasty," Jane shuddered.

Steve shook the eight ball and winked at Jane. He cleared his throat and focused on the toy, asking in a loud, clear voice, "Have Jane and Will learned their lesson?" Jane was paying rapt attention to what the prediction would be. Her eyes grew wide as the answer appeared.

"All signs point to yes," he read.

"Too bad Mom and Hop won't take the eight ball's word for it," Will replied. "They're going to make us suffer longer than one day."

"You'll survive," Steve reassured him. "As much as I'd like to keep hanging out here, I've got to go. I have a class at the academy this afternoon. I'll be sure to tell your dad you're behaving perfectly."

"Thanks, Steve!" Jane said, giving him a hug.

"Bye, you two. Don't raid the liquor cabinet," and he was out the door.

A few minutes later, as Jane had settled down with Snowball, the phone rang. She jumped up to answer it, hoping it would be Mike.

"Hello?" A pause, then, "Hi, Mike! I miss you too! I'm so bored."

Will flopped on the couch and retrieved the eight ball from where Steve had set it on the coffee table.

"Yeah, consequences suck. But don't tell parents that, Steve and Will told me."

Another pause, Will wondered if Mike was calling on the phone because his parents did take away his radio. The plus side of that would be no more middle of the night calls waking me up, Will thought.

"Aw, Mike, I wish you were here too," Jane cooed into the phone.

Will pretended to gag and asked the eight ball, "Are my sister and my best friend going to make me puke?" He shook it then read the answer, "You can count on it." He rolled the eight ball across the room and turned over onto his stomach, holding the couch pillow over his ears.

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"Can I get some help, please?" Joyce called as she unlocked the door, juggling her purse and a bag of groceries.

"Yes, ma'am!" Jane yelled, running to get the sack and carry it into the kitchen. Hopper walked in a few steps behind her, also holding a bag.

He set it on the counter as he felt his daughter's arms wrap tightly around his waist, hugging him as if she hadn't seen him in weeks.

"I missed you, Dad! And I'm here to be helpful," she said enthusiastically.

"Well, that's nice, Janie," he said in response and she beamed with pride.

"Wasn't bored today!" She said in a chipper voice, then added, "It



didn't even suck. Uh, sir."

Hopper looked at her with a confused expression. What was she up to, he wondered.

Jane turned to Will who had brought in the rest of the groceries from Joyce's car, and gave him a big smile. He just shook his head, thinking she needed to dial it back.

"Harrington told me you were both behaving when he came by," Hopper commented as they all put away the groceries.

"Yes, sir! We were being very good. I talked to Mike on the phone. He's grounded too. But I'm not complaining!"

Her dad chuckled, he and Joyce sharing a puzzled look. Jane sure was happy for being in trouble. When everything was unloaded, she took her dad's hand and got his attention, looking at him with a fixed stare.

"Daddy," she began, and his eyebrow quirked. She rarely, if ever, called him that. "I'm really sorry about what we did. Really, really sorry." Then she motioned with her finger for him to bend down close, face to face, and she kissed his cheek.

"There," she stated. "That's kissing up. Sir. Are you eating that up?"

## 6. Chapter 6- Merry

Hello and thanks to everyone who is reading/following/favoriting/reviewing! This took a while, sorry about the wait! I know there's no bad guy or monster which sometimes makes for a bit of a mundane read but hey, I warned you- this is fluff LOL. I'm a sucker for the family stuff. And the next chapter will have some Mileven. Do you think El will go by Jane in season three? I'm thinking she will still be El because it will take place in summer. My head canon likes to think that Hopper will start calling her Jane though. Enjoy this chapter!

"Daddy," she began, and his eyebrow quirked. She rarely, if ever, called him that. "I'm really sorry about what we did. Really, really sorry." Then she motioned with her finger for him to bend down close, face to face, and she kissed his cheek.

"There," she stated. "That's kissing up. Sir. Are you eating that up?"

Behind them, Will smacked his forehead and shook his head in disbelief. Jane may be hopeless, he thought to himself.

"Ah, so that's what's going on, huh? Kissing up?" Hopper realized.

"Yes, sir!"

"Tone it down, kid. New word of the day: 'Overcompensate.' Go look it up."

"But Will and Steve said I should, because parents eat that u..."

Will hurried forward, attempting damage control by interrupting her. "What's for dinner? Jane and I can get it started."

Hopper smirked at him, now knowing exactly what was happening here.

"In a minute. I want to hear more about what Will and Steve said. What else?" He asked Jane.

"When you're in trouble, be polite and say I'm sorry and be helpful," Jane reported proudly.

"Is that so? I feel so enlightened."

"Don't know what that means," Jane said with a frown at the big word. "But that's all I know about kissing up. So grown ups don't get madder."

Will had his head thrown back in frustration.

"Right, Will?" Jane asked, eager for his confirmation.

"No comment," he grumbled. "I'd like to actually leave this house sometime before my senior prom."

Hopper laughed and patted Will on the shoulder. "It's okay, son. I'm not mad. I know you're trying to be a good brother. She just takes everything literally, you know. Really literally."

"I think I'm figuring that out," Will huffed.

"Listen you two, we know you're sorry. It's our job to make sure the consequences fit the crime, though. So no matter much 'kissing up' is going on, you're still grounded tomorrow. And a few days after that. We said a week." Jane and Will exchanged a glance, both thinking the same thing. Christmas Eve was only two days away.

"How do you even drink beer and smoke cigarettes?" Jane asked, wide eyed, choosing not to respond to her dad's reminder of consequences. "They're so gross," and she turned a bit green at the thought.

"Good. Keep it that way," he pronounced with a finality that told her to drop the topic.

"It's snowing again," Will noticed, looking out the window longingly.

"I think it's going to be a white Christmas. I hope my dad makes it okay driving," Hopper said.

"Granddad's coming?" Jane's face lit up at the thought.

"He sure is. He'll be here for lunch on Christmas Day."

Jane gulped and looked worried, hands fidgeting and eyes downcast.

"Why the long face?" Hopper asked. "You love when Granddad visits."

The floor held her interest, her voice having trouble finding the words. "Are you gonna tell him what we did?" She all but whispered. "Don't want him to be mad at me. Or disappointed."

A big arm encircled her shoulders, a scruffy face planting a kiss on top of her head. She relaxed into the hug, his familiar scent and embrace comforting her immediately.

"Don't worry, kid. As tempting as it is, since you loved all those stories he told you about me, I won't tell. I could though, for payback."

Her gaze found his, the twinkle in his eye letting her know he wasn't serious.

"Thanks, Dad. Do you think he'd be mad? If he did know?"

"Well, he wouldn't be thrilled" he agreed. "But remember, he raised me. I don't think much would surprise him."

"You can say that again," Joyce laughed, having re-entered the kitchen. "You told me yourself you were 12 or 13 when you first tried smoking."

Jane's mouth gaped open. "Granddad told me that story!" She realized, feeling obviously scandalized that she was being punished for doing the same thing her dad had done. "No fair that we're in trouble!"

"Oh no," Hopper shook his head "I definitely had consequences, remember that part?"

"Maybe," Jane admitted sheepishly.

"I thought so. Now, does that offer still stand to help with dinner?"

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"Joyce, that meal was delicious," Hopper's dad announced, leaning

back in his chair and rubbing his belly.

"Thank you, James. I'm so glad you were able to come," Joyce replied kindly, patting her father in law's hand.

"Of course. I wouldn't miss Christmas with my family. I've gained a granddaughter and two grandsons this year, after all!"

"Mom, I'm heading to see Nancy and give her her present, okay?" Jonathan asked, rising from the table.

"That's fine honey, just don't be gone too long, and tell the Wheelers Merry Christmas from us."

"I'll be back soon. Sorry to rush out on Christmas," he said to his new granddad.

"Quite alright! I remember what it's like to be young and in love."

Jonathan blushed, a smile creeping across his face in spite of himself. "And thank you again for the new tripod! It's great."

"You're very welcome. A little bird told me you needed a new one," he winked at Joyce.

"Sometimes I think he's using us for free room and board," Joyce quipped, as Jonathan was out the door. "He's only here enough to sleep and eat."

"Don't worry, honey," Hopper chuckled. "We have two others that keep us busy enough."

As if on cue, their conversation was interrupted by a crashing sound, a loud meow, a voice yelling, "Daaadd," and another voice saying, "Ssshh, don't tell!"

Joyce locked eyes with her husband, and sighed, "What was that? They only left the table five minutes ago."

"I'll investigate," he said. "You and Dad sit and visit."

Walking into the next room, he was met with quite the chaotic sight.

Will was on the floor, crawling and picking up game pieces that were strewn about, scattered among boxes and wrapping paper. Jane sat glaring at him, cross legged with Snowball on her lap. Seeing her dad, she immediately blurted, "Will almost squashed Snowball! Tell him that's not nice!"

"I didn't do it on purpose!" Will retorted.

"Okay, what happened?" Hopper asked, his hand rubbing his forehead.

"I had all this stuff stacked up to take to my room and her dumb cat ran under my feet and I dropped it all." Will explained, standing up. Jane held Snowball close and looked aghast as his assessment.

"No, Snowball likes the wrapping paper and she was playing with it and you almost stepped on her. And about fell on her. And she's not dumb!"

"She tripped me! My arms were full, how was I supposed to see she was right under my feet?!"

"You should have been looking where you were going," Jane responded matter of factly.

At that, Will's voice dropped to a whisper, "You *stopped* me from falling on her. I felt it. Want to tell your dad about that?"

Hopper's eyebrows raised and his voice held a warning tone, "Janie..."

"I didn't mean to, Dad, honest! Not lying. He was about to hurt Snowball, fall on her," she hurried to explain while shooting daggers with her eyes at Will.

"So you used your powers?" Hopper said softly, squatting down next to her, eye to eye. "We've talked about this..."

"My mind just, you know, did it. Didn't want Snowball hurt. I didn't try to do it."

"Yeah, never mind *me* falling, since you let go as soon as Snowball was out from under me and I fell anyway," Will huffed.

"What's going on in here?" Joyce asked, walking in with Hopper's dad.

Hopper stood up and said quietly to her, "I think these two have been cooped up in here for a few days now and they need some fresh air and exercise. Before someone gets hurt."

"We can go outside?" Jane asked hopefully.

"Yes, go play in the snow. Stay close to the house," her father answered. "And no arguing. And no, um, doing anything else you're not supposed to," to which Jane nodded, understanding he meant absolutely no powers.

The teens had coats and gloves on and were gone before the parents could change their minds, leaving so fast they left the front door slightly open. Hopper went to close it, shaking his head.

Outside, Jane watched her breath hang in the cold air. She filled her lungs and exhaled, kicking her feet in the crunchy snow. For a long time after she'd started living with Hopper, she had no interest in snow. It was a painful reminder of being cold and wet and alone and hungry. Like many things though, it was her friends who had opened her eyes to how fun it could be. She glanced at Will, who was forming a small ball of snow in his gloved hands, reaching down to add to it methodically. She narrowed her eyes at him, wondering if he was going to throw it at her. Was he still mad at what she'd done inside?

"What are you doing?" She asked him cautiously.

"Huh?" He looked up with surprise from where he'd been focused on the ball of snow in his hands, still mindlessly rounding it out.

"I'm sorry," she admitted, "For using my powers. Really didn't mean it. And sorry you fell."

"It's okay," he replied. "Sorry I called Snowball dumb. I just didn't want to get in more trouble."

She was still concentrating on Will's hands, patting the ball of snow tightly. He looked down at it, realizing what she thought.

"Jeeze, I'm not gonna throw this at you. Do you really think I'd do that?"

"Don't know," she said, embarrassed now for even thinking it.

"I wouldn't," he assured her. "I mean, unless we were having a snowball fight. Want to build a snowman?"

"Yes!" She answered brightly.

"I thought I'd go crazy if we had to stay inside another day," he said, rolling snow along the ground. She nodded, adding to what he had gathered. They worked in comfortable silence, both grateful for the change in scenery.

They'd finished the base of the snowman when Jonathan's car coming up the driveway took their attention. Seeing not one, but three people emerge from the car, Jane dropped the snow from her hands, and ran, throwing her arms around Mike's neck. He returned the hug.

"Merry Christmas, Mike," she murmured.

"Merry Christmas," he replied, holding on to her, showing no signs of letting go.



## 7. Chapter 7- Christmas

**Sorry that it's been awhile! Mileven fluff coming up. Sorry it's a little short but I hope you enjoy! Thank you for reading and reviewing!**

"I guess my mom finally realized she couldn't make me clean anything else. I can't believe she let me come over now," Mike commented, running his thumb along Jane's hand, currently clasped in his. Her fingers were absentmindedly twirling the friendship bracelet on his wrist, given to him by her one year ago. Will didn't say anything about their semi public display of affection. He was happy to see Mike and watching them hold hands wasn't exactly something new anyway. The three of them sat on Will's bed, catching up on the last few days. "It's like she was telling Holly to make a bunch of messes just so she could make me clean them up!"

"I wish we could go to the arcade or the movies tomorrow," Will said in a voice dangerously close to a whine. "Or play D&D. Or do anything besides be stuck here. Have you talked to Lucas or Dustin?"

"Yeah, right," Mike scoffed. "I had to wait for my mom to go in the basement to wrap presents before I could sneak and call you the other day. She's watching my every move. You'd think we got caught doing drugs or something."

Will snickered, "Hopper asked me if we were!"

"I'm sorry guys," Mike said. "I know neither one of you wanted to do it. Not our smartest move."

"We went along with it," Will assured him. "It's not your fault. We all did it."

Mike nodded, still feeling foolish that they thought they could ever get away with such a dumb idea. Will looked around as if to check for any listening ears before saying, "You know what? I'll go get us some cokes. I can probably distract the parents for, oh, ten minutes or so." Jane looked confused at his choice of words but Mike understood right away. That's a great best friend, he thought.

Will pulled the door behind him, leaving it cracked a bit, enough for some privacy while leaving it open enough for us to hear anyone coming, Mike realized.

Mike knew ten minutes would go fast, and he wasn't even sure if they'd have that much time alone, figuring Jane's dad would love nothing more than to bust in on them. He leaned forward and kissed her right away. She instinctively moved closer to him, returning the kiss and reaching out to clasp her hands at the base of his neck, his resting at her waist. After a moment, she broke the kiss to catch her breath, resting her forehead against his and exhaling.

"I've missed you so much," Mike sighed.

The closeness in the quiet room was heaven, he thought. Normally their kisses were stolen quickly in fleeting moments between classes, in Mike's basement or the arcade when the rest of the party were briefly occupied. Though Hopper had relaxed many of the previous restrictions now that Jane was no longer in hiding, he, Joyce, and Mike's parents all agreed the two were too young to go out on a solo date. Jane and Mike weren't thrilled with that rule but it didn't surprise them. Even Nancy hadn't been allowed to go on dates at 14, Mike knew. Though he'd like to think his maturity and commitment to Jane would help his cause. Maybe when we are 15, he thought hopefully.

"Missed you too," she sighed, giving his cheek a brief kiss before laying her head on his shoulder. His arms were now firmly wrapped around her back, not wanting any space between them. He pressed a soft kiss to her temple, inhaling her scent. He loved the way her hair smelled. How did I survive 353 days apart, he thought to himself. They spent the next few minutes talking in soft whispers and occasional giggles, telling each other what they'd gotten for Christmas and how they were passing the time while they weren't allowed to go anywhere.

"Maybe we can plan something for New Year's," Mike commented quietly, still twirling their hands together. "Do you think your parents will let you go out?"

"That's another week. Hope I won't be still grounded then. Dad did

say I have to work on that English homework, though."

"i can help you," he said hopefully.

"Maybe," she agreed. "Don't really like 'Romeo and Juliet.' It has so many hard words! I don't get it," she said, shaking her head.

Mike's face broke into a grin and he dropped to one knee on the floor in front of the bed. Her eyes grew wide.

"But soft!" He pronounced in a horrible attempt at a flowery British accent. "'Tis the east, and Juliet, um, I mean Jane, is the sun!"

He bent low to kiss the hand in his, her other hand covering her mouth and the fit of laughter that was her response. She dissolved into giggles. He looked up at her with a huge smile, pleased he'd made her laugh.

"Mike," she sputtered through her laughter, "I love you!"

His face blushed red and he drew in a sharp breath. Her hand was still in his, and he looked into her eyes from his position still kneeling before her.

"I love you too," he whispered.

She smiled warmly and Mike felt his heart almost burst. They were so focused on each other, they both jumped in shock when a voice broke through the quiet moment.

"Down on one knee, huh, Wheeler? Jumping the gun a little, aren't you?" Chief Hopper asked from the doorway, arms crossed and a scowl on his face.

## 8. Chapter 8- Shakespeare

**The idea for part of this came to me after seeing seeing some set photos of Millie wearing glasses. I don't know if they were hers or Eleven's but it seemed like a fun thing to explore here. Thank you all for reading, please leave a review!**

"Down on one knee, huh, Wheeler? Jumping the gun a little, aren't you?" Chief Hopper asked from the doorway, arms crossed and a scowl on his face.

Mike promptly scrambled to his feet, face blushing red with embarrassment. I swear the universe hates me, he thought. How does Hopper always walk in at the worst possible moments? I look like an idiot, like I'm gonna propose or something at age 14. He rolled his eyes and shoved his hands in his pockets, bracing himself for the lecture he felt sure was coming his way.

"Mike was helping me with homework," Jane explained matter of factly. "Romeo and Juliet."

"Romeo had better remember the rules," Hopper commented, arms still tightly crossed, fixing his daughter with a stern look.

"We weren't breaking any," Jane countered.

"Hmm, I don't think you two are supposed to be in your room alone," he answered, the whole interaction making Mike even more nervous. But Jane wasn't scared. Not of her dad.

"Not in my room. Will's. And the door was open."

"Jesus, kid, do you have to talk back to everything I say?" He asked rhetorically, letting out an audible breath and running his hand over his face.

"No. Not everything," she replied seriously.

Mike stifled the laugh that was threatening to erupt from his mouth. He wanted to crack up at Jane's responses but knew that would not win him any points with the chief. He settled for clearing his throat

and looking around the room to avoid making eye contact with Hopper.

Suddenly Will entered and took in the scene of Hopper and Jane staring each other down.

"I got us some Cokes and snacks!" He announced, setting the food down on his desk, hoping to cut through some of the obvious tension in the room.

"Let's take those back in the kitchen. The Shakespeare lesson can continue in there," Hopper said, motioning with his hand for Jane to head to the bedroom door. "I'm not sure what I walked in on but it didn't look like homework," he added, cutting his eyes toward Mike, who was moving hastily toward the door behind Jane.

"There's my beautiful granddaughter!" Hopper's father beamed when they appeared in the kitchen. He and Joyce were sitting at the table, talking over cups of coffee. "I thought we'd lost you once your young man showed up," he continued, winking at Jane.

"Sorry," she mumbled, realizing it had been kind of rude to forget everyone else when Mike had arrived.

"Oh it's okay, honey, I was just teasing," her grandfather reassured her, patting the chair next to him for her to sit down. Mike sat on the other side of her, giving her grandfather a shaky smile.

"I grabbed that Shakespeare assignment just in case you were serious about doing homework," Hopper said, tossing the packet on the table in front of the kids. Jane scowled and mumbled, "No homework on Christmas."

"Is that so? You brought it up, said Wheeler was helping with school work," he responded, twinkle in his eye indicating he was having fun with this.

Snatching the papers, she made a point to try and focus on the words, squinting and furrowing her brow. Hopper chuckled, thinking at first she was pouting, then focused on her face as she frowned at the paper, her hand absentmindedly rubbing her head. He studied her

expression and how frustrated she looked, and immediately felt bad for having thrown the work on the table and giving her a hard time.

"Hey, you're right, it's Christmas. This stuff can wait," he said, a comforting hand on her shoulder.

"Those words are tiny. And all fuzzy. Makes my head hurt," she commented, relieved to relegate the packet toward the middle of the table and away from her. Her fingers were pushing into her eyelids, as if trying to alleviate pressure.

Joyce honed in on that, asking, "Does reading make your head hurt?"

"Sometimes," Jane replied, shrugging her shoulders.

"Hop..." Joyce began.

"Yeah, I'm wondering the same thing," he interrupted, knowing exactly what she was thinking.

Seeing Jane looking anxious, he quickly ended the conversation saying, "We'll talk about it more later. Right now, Mike and Nancy need to be heading home. I don't want to incur the wrath of Karen Wheeler for keeping her kids all day on Christmas."

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"Ready for bed, sweetie? Have you had a good Christmas?" Joyce asked that night when she and Hop went in to say good night to Jane. She was snuggled in bed, Snowball purring softly from her spot at the end of the covers.

"Yes! I love Christmas," she answered brightly, as they sat down on the side of her bed. She noticed her dad was holding the papers that were her English homework and her smile instantly turned into a frown.

"Relax, kid, we just want to check on something, okay?" Her dad asked. She nodded, totally confused at where this was going.

"Hold this," he said, putting the papers in her hand resting in her lap. "Now look down. Do the words look fuzzy?"

Again, her only response was a nod. They could feel her nervousness.

"Okay, now slowly bring it up and stop when it isn't fuzzy anymore. Can you do that?"

Another nod, accompanied by a confused expression. What was this about, she wondered.

She did as her dad asked, stopping when the words on the page were clearer. Her parents exchanged a look, Joyce asking, "Do you ever have a hard time seeing the board at school?"

Jane thought for a moment. The writing on the board did look unclear but didn't it look that way to everybody? She had never thought about it before.

"I don't know," she admitted, tossing the papers on the bed. "Why?"

"We think you may need to see an eye doctor. It's nothing bad," Joyce said kindly, putting her arm around Jane's shoulder. Jane tensed and shook her head.

"Don't want to go to that." She wasn't sure what an eye doctor was but she hated going to any kind of doctor, and the thought of someone poking around her eyes had her terrified.

"Janie, we will be there the whole time. You may need glasses. If you do, the words won't look fuzzy anymore," her dad explained. "And reading won't make your head hurt. Doesn't that sound better?"

"I guess," she agreed. "But don't want to go to that doctor. And don't want glasses." Her expression was stubborn.

Hopper thought, I know that look. It usually preceded shaking furniture and flickering lights. He sighed, struggling with how best to prevent this from escalating to that point. It had practically taken an act of Congress to get Jane to let Dr. Owens give her the required immunizations before she could start school. She had screamed, cried, and refused to go until her dad convinced her in no uncertain terms, no shots meant no school. She'd hated it but finally gave in because she desperately wanted to go to school with her friends. She had been a nervous wreck at the appointment, cutting off the

circulation in Hopper's hand from squeezing it so tightly.

"I have an idea," Joyce said. "What if Mike comes with us to the eye doctor?"

"I'm not sure about that..." Hopper stammered, his eyes boring into his wife's.

"Could he, Dad?" Jane asked quietly, contemplating the possibility. Maybe it wouldn't be too bad if Mike were there.

Hopper exhaled, knowing when he was outnumbered.

"You'll go if I say yes? No pitching a fit?"

Jane thought for a moment before nodding and replying, "It won't be any shots, will it?"

"No shots," he answered.

"You'll be there? And Mike?"

"Yes," he agreed reluctantly.

"I'll go. To the eye doctor."



## 9. Chapter 9- Compromise

**Many thanks to everyone who is reading and following! Please leave a review!**

"How exactly did it happen that I'll be taking my daughter to the eye doctor, along with Mike Wheeler, hm?" Hopper asked Joyce that night while they were getting in bed.

"It worked, didn't it? Point to me," she responded, crawling under the covers and scooting next to him.

"I could have convinced her to go," he answered, in mock indignation. "You didn't give me a chance! I was working on it."

"Without a telekinetic tantrum? Without any lights blowing out? Admit it, my idea worked much faster and with less damage." She propped herself up on one elbow, looking at him intensely, one eyebrow quirked.

"I admit nothing," he countered, pulling her close and kissing her.

"I bet I can get you to agree I'm right," she mumbled against his mouth, her hands roaming.

"You're using unfair tactics," he responded weakly. She keeps doing what she's doing, I'd admit to anything from the Kennedy assassination to faking the lunar landing, he thought to himself.

"I do have my ways," she whispered, reaching with her free hand to turn off the bedside lamp.

Dr. Owens had pulled a few strings to get the appointment with an ophthalmologist quickly. He was friends with an eye doctor who agreed to work Jane in while she was still on Christmas break. The morning of the appointment, Jane sat at the kitchen table looking nervous. What does an eye doctor even do, she wondered. The thought made her shiver. Doctors usually meant needles, though her dad had promised her there wouldn't be any. Seeing her twirling the spoon in her bowl of oatmeal and frowning, Joyce reached out a comforting

hand and patted hers.

"Remember we told you the eye doctor doesn't hurt. Nothing to be scared of. And your dad will be right there," she reminded Jane gently.

"And Mike, don't forget," she replied to Joyce.

"How could I forget," Joyce laughed. Jane had only reiterated their agreement at every opportunity.

"Compromise," Jane said seriously. "Going to eye doctor means Mike too."

"Yes, that's right. You and your dad are picking him up on the way."

"Does that kid have to be there every time I turn around," Hopper grumbled into his coffee cup.

"Dad! You promised," Jane reminded him.

"Calm down, kid. He's coming with us. Which also means you hold up your end of the deal. No fits, no using powers."

"I know, and I'll be good. But sometimes my powers just, come out. What then?"

"Stay calm and you'll be fine. If you get really upset you may lose control."

Seeing how anxious that possibility made her, he quickly amended, "It will all be okay. Just squeeze my hand. Or Mike's," he added in spite of himself. He could just imagine objects starting to levitate at the doctor's office. It hadn't happened at school, no reason to think it would today. The fateful Dr. Owens visit the previous summer for Jane's vaccinations did have his office lights flickering and the blinds shaking but thankfully no one else was there to see it. Today wouldn't be that bad, surely.

"I'm Cheryl Brown," the doctor introduced herself kindly, shaking Hopper's hand.

"Nice to meet you Dr. Brown. And thank you for taking us on short notice," Hopper said.

"It's no trouble at all. Sam Owens is an old and dear friend of mine. We met in medical school, so you can imagine how long ago that was. I was happy to work your daughter in. I take it this is Jane?" She had a calming smile and soothing voice.

Hopper stepped a bit to the side so the doctor could see Jane, who was basically hiding behind him, her hand firmly clasped in Mike's. Her dad encouraged her, "Say hello to Dr. Brown, honey."

"Hello," she whispered.

"And who is this?" The doctor asked, glancing at Mike.

"That's Jane's, um, friend, Mike Wheeler. She was a bit nervous about coming today. He's here for moral support," Hopper explained. Mike smiled and waved at the doctor, keeping close to Jane. Hopper didn't miss how intently he was focused on her, making sure she was okay. Yep, this kid isn't going anywhere. Hopper could practically feel the boy's affection for his daughter.

"I understand. So tell me Jane, what grade are you in?"

"Ninth," she replied quietly, not yet making eye contact with the woman.

"I bet ninth grade has a lot of reading, doesn't it? It's been a while for me but I do remember," Dr. Brown commented. "Is it sometimes hard for you to see the words clearly when you're reading?"

Jane nodded, her eyes still on the floor. Hopper mentally cursed that bastard Brenner. Poor kid would probably always be as nervous as a cat around doctors.

"And words on the board at the front of the room? Those look fuzzy to you too?" The doctor was speaking so patiently to Jane, for which Hopper was infinitely grateful. He'd have to call and thank Owens later. This woman was the perfect fit for Jane. Someone loud or overbearing would have had her on edge.

"It sounds like you may need glasses. We need to check out your eyes to see what's going on. You'll read some letters on my wall in a bunch of different ways and tell me when they look the clearest. Can we do that?"

Jane didn't respond so her dad cleared his throat and nudged her slightly. He'd been patient too but he knew his child wasn't mute and could at least talk to the doctor. It worked to get her attention.

"Yes, ma'am. We can do that," Jane answered politely, though her voice was shaky with worry. "Can Mike come?"

"Of course. Your father can come too," Dr. Brown answered.

The exam room was a tight fit for the four of them so Hopper stood next to the door while Mike stuck close to Jane, their hands never parting, even while Dr. Brown examined Jane's vision. When the doctor said she needed to put drops in Jane's eyes, she tensed and Mike offered to have them in his eyes too if that would help. Jane smiled and let out the the breath she'd been holding but said no that it was okay. She accepted the drops, with Mike and her dad each by her side. Jane relaxed slowly during the course of the exam, even when the doctor had told her that glasses were indeed needed.

The group made their way to the area where there were hundreds of glasses frames to choose from. Jane's mouth dropped open when she realized she could choose any she wanted. How could she ever decide? She and Mike started choosing various frames, Mike making her giggle when he tried some on, then whipped them off like Clark Kent turning into Superman. Hopper was talking to the doctor, while Jane tried on different styles.

"Am I going to look silly?" She asked Mike tentatively, tucking her hair behind her ears.

"No way!" He retorted. "You're already smart and these are going to make you look even smarter. And prettier," he added with a blush.

"Really? What about these?" She asked him, turning to face him. Mike took in her cautious smile, the way the glasses framed her eyes, and he had to fight the urge to kiss her. To him, she was the prettiest girl

in the world. He broke into a huge grin. That was all the reassurance she needed.

"Dad!" She called to where he stood at the counter, "These are the ones I want."

"I thought I was going to get the glasses today. Why do we have to come back?" Jane asked, her voice tinged with a whine, as they pulled out of the doctor's office, Jane and Mike sitting in the backseat of the truck.

"They have to make them for your prescription," Hopper explained. "Dr. Brown said it would be about a week. You didn't even want to come and now you're complaining that you didn't get the glasses right away?"

She shrugged, not really knowing why she felt so impatient. It could have had something to do with Mike's reaction to seeing her in the glasses.

"When I looked through that big machine, Dr. Brown showed me what things would look like with my glasses. Everything looked so different! The letters weren't fuzzy at all."

Hopper felt a pang of guilt. How long had his daughter struggled with her eyesight and he'd had no idea? An entire year of staring at a TV in his tiny cabin probably hadn't helped matters any. Her face had lit up when the doctor had shown her how much her vision could improve with her new glasses.

"Will other kids make fun of me?" Jane quietly asked Mike, her head on his shoulder, their fingers intertwined in his lap. "Mouthbreathers?"

"Lots of people wear glasses," Mike answered. "It's not like you'll be the only one."

"Katie Gibbs wears glasses. She's really nice. She sits next to me in Spanish," Jane realized.

"Yep, and so does Jay Watson and he's a big jock. Besides, if anyone makes fun of you, just make them trip and fall. Then they'll look like

idiots!" Mike laughed at the mental image of Jane cocking her head at some jerk, making them topple over out of nowhere. Jane giggled too.

"Uh, that's a firm no!" Came a stern voice from the front seat.

"I'm kidding and she knows it," Mike hastily explained. "Jane would never do that!"

"She'd better not," Hopper added with a warning tone.

"Jeeze, it was just a joke..." Mike muttered.

"What was that? Something else you wanted to say?"

Mike sat up a little straighter and quickly replied, "No, sir, nothing at all!"

Jane picked up on the need to change the subject, even though seeing her dad and Mike go back and forth at each other made her snicker. She didn't want it to go so far that her dad actually got angry at her boyfriend.

"Hey, Dad?" She asked.

"Mmm?" Came the distracted reply as Hopper was focusing on trying to turn left into the diner parking lot. He'd promised Jane burgers and milkshakes if she behaved herself at the doctor.

"You said I could see Mama soon."

"Yes, I said we'd go around New Year's but I don't think we'll have the glasses by then," he explained, thinking she wanted to show them to her mother.

"I know but I wanted to ask you, can Mike come? I want him to meet Mama."

## 10. Chapter 10- Mama

*Sorry it's been a while! I am a teacher and back to school time always kicks my tail for a few weeks. This chapter is a bit short but I hope you enjoy it! Only two more chapters to go in this one. Please leave a review and thanks for reading!*

"You said I could see Mama soon."

"Yes, I said we'd go around New Year's but I don't think you'll have the glasses by then," he explained, thinking she was probably excited to show them to her mother.

"I know but I wanted to ask you, can Mike come? I want him to meet Mama."

Hopper pulled into a parking space. That is not what he'd expected to hear. He sighed as he turned off the truck and ran a hand along his forehead. Was she going to ask if the boy could just move in next?

"I'll think about it, kid. We will have to talk about it," was his noncommittal reply. He wanted to say no but honestly could not think of a legitimate reason. Except that bringing Mike to visit Terry would be awkward and maybe even harder on Jane than their usual visits, if that were possible.

Jane huffed, unbuckling her seat belt and grumbling, "I'll think about it always means no." She glared at her dad and stomped toward the restaurant. Not a good way to help your case, kid, he thought.

"No it doesn't. It means I'll think about it. Keep up that attitude and it will be a no for sure, though," he added, reaching for her hand, stopping her from trudging into oncoming cars. "And slow down. You're not even looking where you're going and this is a crowded parking lot."

She accepted his hand reluctantly and looked over her shoulder to make sure Mike was close behind, which he was, cutting her eyes at Hopper in the process. He furrowed his bushy eyebrows and frowned.

"Are you going to keep on acting this way? If so, we can take Mike home and skip lunch altogether."

"No fair! I was good at the doctor!"

"And now you're pitching a fit."

"I just want to take Mike to meet Mama," she pouted, crossing her arms. She was facing her dad now, a stand off about to occur in this parking lot, Hopper thought.

"I said we would talk about it. Which we will. After your behavior turns around."

Mike hurried over to her and whispered something in her ear. She visibly relaxed, giving Mike a shy smile.

"Sorry," she said quietly as she put her arms around Hopper's waist in a hug. And we're back to kissing up, he realized. At least she wasn't talking back anymore. What had Wheeler said to her? Of course her demeanor had changed the minute he'd stepped in. Hopper rolled his eyes. My child could argue with me all day long but a few words from that boy and she's all apologies. Teenagers, he thought with an annoyed sigh.

"So you're ready to be respectful?"

She nodded against his chest, still wrapped around him in an embrace.

"Let's go in then. I've worked up quite an appetite."

They sat at a booth and when Jane excused herself to go to the restroom, Hopper saw an opportunity to have a quick chat with Mike. He gave Jane two quarters and told her to choose a couple of songs on the jukebox. She eagerly pocketed the coins and headed to the bathroom.

"I'm sure she's told you that her mom's not well..." Hopper began, eyes not looking up from the menu in front of him.

Mike nodded, his eyes also fully intent on the menu, which they both



knew was a diversion. They'd each eaten at the diner a thousand times and knew exactly what the menu said. Hopper put his down, knowing they only had a short time before Jane rejoined them. He focused on Mike.

"Look at me a minute. And listen."

Mike obeyed, squirming in his seat at what he knew was about to be an uncomfortable conversation.

"I know what you're going to say. It's okay. Her mom's sick, I get it." Don't treat me like a little kid, he wanted to add, but refrained.

"It's not just that she's sick. It's hard to see someone in a state like she's in. It's not exactly a pleasant visit."

Does he think I can't handle it, Mike inwardly scoffed. Surely Hopper knew that Mike had faced much worse. Heck, they had faced worse together.

"I know," Mike said impatiently.

"No, you really don't," he corrected Mike with a scoff. Nothing prepares you for seeing a person who is alive but not there. The empty expression staring straight ahead, the incoherent muttering of random words in place of communication. Not to mention the heartbreaking face of his daughter searching her mother's eyes for a hint of recognition. He needed to warn Mike of that part too.

"Here's another thing. It's tough on Jane to go up there. I think deep down she hopes her mom will be better every time we go but it's always the same. She usually cries on the way home. It's not easy."

Mike took in a sharp breath, realizing Hopper was trying to prepare him not only to see Jane's mom but to be there for Jane in the aftermath.

"She wants me to go," Mike practically whispered. "It's important to her. I want to be there for her. So, is it okay?"

"As long as you understand what to expect. And it's alright with your parents, of course."

"Mike! Come help me choose!" Jane called from the jukebox, where she stood flipping through the song selection and twirling the quarters between her fingers.

"He'll be there in just a second," Hopper answered before Mike could speak. Mike looked at him expectantly. He'd thought they were done talking. What now?

"One more thing," Hopper began. Mike willed himself not to roll his eyes. This man controls when and how often I see Jane, he repeated to himself silently.

"What did you say to Jane in the parking lot? When she was about start world war three with me?"

Mike shrugged, "I just told her I didn't want her to get in trouble. I told her not to get herself grounded."

"Good advice," Hopper admitted.

## 11. Chapter 11- Visit

**Yikes, I did not realize how long it had been since my last chapter! If you are still reading, I thank you and ask you to please leave a review. Only one more chapter to go in this one and it will be up soon, I promise!**

Joyce Hopper was enjoying a rare moment of quiet alone. She did not even have the TV or radio on, instead choosing to relish the calm, no one else in the house. This house, where she had raised her babies, and protected them from their father, often incurring his wrath on herself. This house, whose walls and windows she had destroyed when her son was in danger, taken by dark forces most mothers only saw in horror movies.

Currently, this house that had seen so much terror was warm, safe, and serene. Will was at Dustin's, Jonathan was with Nancy, and Hop and Jane had not returned from the eye doctor trip. Joyce cradled a coffee mug in her hands, head back on the couch, listening to the gentle sounds around her. The heat softly churning, cars occasionally driving by, the clock quietly ticking on the wall. The silence was disturbed by the sound of her husband's truck rumbling up the driveway and she smiled. As much as she liked the quiet, she was also eager to hear about her stepdaughter's visit to the eye doctor.

"Joyce! I am getting glasses and they're purple and Mike is coming with us to meet Mama!" Jane yelled, bursting through the door, so full of energy that she almost ran into the coffee table.

"Slow down, train wreck," Hopper quipped, coming in a step behind her and closing the door. "I think people a block away could hear you."

"Hush, Hop. She's excited," Joyce grinned, hugging Jane.

"Really? I had no idea," Hopper replied sarcastically, winking at his wife.

"I didn't get my glasses, Joyce," Jane explained intently. "But the doctor was a nice pretty lady and she let me pick out ones I liked

best. Purple ones. Mike likes them too."

"Purple glasses sound perfect, sweetie. The doctor was pretty, huh?" Joyce teased, raising her eyebrows at Hopper, who held up his hands in defense. "I didn't say that, Jane did. I barely noticed what she looked like. I was more concerned with making sure my child didn't bust out any lights in the woman's office."

"I was good!" Jane retorted in indignation, crossing her arms. "No powers and no fits."

"Yes, you were very good," he acknowledged, kissing the top of her head. And he added, "Until we got to the diner, that is..." Jane looked embarrassed, and turned quickly on the spot.

"Going to my room to read!" She called over her shoulder as she hurried down the hall, not wanting to hang around in case another lecture was about to come her way.

"What was that about?" Joyce asked, making her way to the couch, pulling Hopper to sit next to her.

"She got all bent out of shape when I said I'd have to think about taking Wheeler to visit Terry next time. You know how she is when she gets something in her head. I threatened to bring her home. Good thing I didn't have to follow through. I was hungry," he said with a smirk, propping his feet on the coffee table with a thud.

Joyce nestled into his side and asked, "She wants to take Mike to see Terry, huh? I guess we shouldn't be surprised. What did you say?"

Hopper inhaled and sighed, "I gave in. I did have a talk with the boy. Wanted him to know what to expect, as much as that's possible. Of course he acted like he already has it all figured out."

Joyce nodded in understanding. Like Jane, she often got her hopes up when they went to see Terry, imagining the woman may recognize her daughter in some overt way. It pained Joyce to think of not knowing her children, and she could not fathom what Terry's life had been like at the hands of Brenner. She shuddered and put her head on her husband's shoulder, wrapping her arms around his sturdy chest

for comfort.

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A few days later, Hopper found himself walking up to Becky and Terry's door, his daughter and her boyfriend at his heels. Jane had one hand in Mike's, the other clutching a set of pictures she'd drawn for her mother.

"Aunt Becky!" Jane beamed when the door opened. Her aunt greeted them with a warm, yet tired, smile. She opened her arms to Jane, who eagerly returned the embrace.

"Happy New Year, Jim," Becky said affectionately, looking at Hopper over Jane's head.

"Aunt Becky, this is Mike," Jane introduced them, bringing Mike forward, their hands still clasped.

"Nice to meet you, young man," Becky said, reaching out to shake the boy's hand.

"Nice to meet you too, Mrs. uh..." Mike stumbled over the words before awkwardly clearing his throat and closing his mouth. God, I'm already making a fool of myself, he thought to himself. He could almost feel Hopper chuckling behind him.

"Oh please, call me Aunt Becky. You're practically family, I have a feeling," she replied, winking at Jane, who blushed slightly.

Hopper suppressed a scowl and they stepped into the little house.

"What have you got there?" Becky asked, pointing to the papers in her niece's hand.

"I drew these for Mama!" Jane answered proudly. "I thought we could put them up where she can see them, and you know, think of me."

"That's a great idea," Becky replied, putting her arm around Jane's shoulder with a gentle squeeze. "I'm sure she will love them. Even if she can't tell us so. Let's show her, hmmm? And introduce Mike of course."

Jane's response was an enthusiastic nod. Hopper excused himself to have a cigarette on the porch, figuring he'd be in the way. He watched the kids enter the room where Terry usually sat in her chair, staring blankly.

Jane headed that way, still clasping Mike's hand. Mike was trying hard not to show his nervousness, for her sake.

"Mama, I brought someone to meet you. Someone important. His name is Mike," Jane said, standing next to her mother. She leaned down to kiss her forehead.

Terry Ives did not move or change her gaze or acknowledge their presence in any way. Mike thought he was prepared but he was still shocked. It was like she was there, but not with them at all. He squeezed Jane's hand a bit tighter, realizing how hard this must be on her. As much as his own mother could be a pain sometimes, he found himself with a lump in his throat, accompanied by the urge to throw his arms around his mom when he got home and never let go.

"Breathe...sunflower... rainbow," Jane's mom was muttering mindlessly but her daughter seemed unfazed. Of course, Mike told himself, she's used to this. This is the only way she'd ever known her mother. He found it incredibly sad and unsettling.

"I brought you some pictures," Jane explained as her aunt taped them to the wall next to the TV.

"This one is you and me, and this one is me and my friends at the arcade. Do you know what an arcade is? It's really loud and fun and has lots of lights..."

Jane continued to describe the artwork, while Mike made eye contact with Hopper, who was walking back into the house. The chief gave Mike a small nod, an unspoken inquiry as to whether everything was going alright. Mike nodded his response, glancing back at Jane who was still talking to her mother, who gave no acknowledgement.

"I made cookies! Who wants a snack?" Becky asked, taking the tray out of the oven.

"Go on, Mike," Jane said, turning the TV to static. "I'm going to talk to Mama."

Hopper motioned for Mike to come to the kitchen, knowing Jane would need privacy. Mike watched from the kitchen table as Jane covered her eyes and knelt by her mother, holding her hand.

"Can they really talk when she does that?" Mike asked Becky.

"Not talk like you and I are right now. But they can communicate somehow on that level. It seems to bring them both some comfort."

Mike nodded and reached for a cookie, thinking he would definitely hug his mom and thank her for always being there for him, even when he had never told her so before.

## 12. Chapter 12- epilogue

**Only a few days till season 3- can't wait! I really enjoyed writing this story. Huge thanks to all who have read, favorited, and reviewed. (Special shout out to the guest reviewer who said I'm a sh\*t writer. Your opinion is noted). To everyone else, please leave a review. Thank you!**

Chief Jim Hopper took one last puff of his cigarette and tossed it out of the window as he pulled his truck into the parking lot of Hawkins High School. He chuckled as he wondered how many cigarettes he'd put out on this worn pavement over the years, starting at around age 14. He laughed to himself, remembering a particularly amusing time when he and Joyce had been caught smoking, scrambling quickly to extinguish the evidence. Joyce had hidden behind him, embarrassed and scared their parents would be notified. A frown and furrowed brow overtook his features as the memory snapped him back to reality and the reason he was there. This time, he was the parent who'd been called to school. When Flo had told him the high school was on the line, his immediate reaction was fear, that something had happened to Jane. He was already reaching for his hat and keys, ready to sprint out the door, when he picked up the phone in his office to hear that his daughter was fine, but he needed to come to school to discuss an incident that had happened. He exhaled upon hearing Jane was okay but hurried out of the police station nonetheless, curious and concerned what this incident could be.

Now he was making his way into the main office of the school, fighting the instinct to go charging in full force to demand an explanation. Joyce would tell him to be calm, he could practically hear her voice in his mind.

"Chief Hopper, thank you for coming," Mrs. Jones, the secretary, greeted him warmly, getting up from her chair to inform the principal of his arrival.

"Hey, Hop," came a quieter voice from the corner of the outer office, where Will sat in a chair, a textbook open on his lap.

"Everything okay, son?" Hopper asked with concern, to which Will



nodded, though his fingers twiddling the pages of his book showed his nervousness.

"Jane shouldn't even be in trouble! She was only protecting..."

His sentence was cut off by the secretary, who opened the door to the principal's office and said, "Come on in, Chief."

Hopper gave Will a reassuring pat on the shoulder and stepped into the inner office.

"Sir, sorry to interrupt your day, I know you must be a busy man," Mr. Weathers said, rising from behind his desk and shaking Hopper's hand.

"It's no problem, I'm never too busy for my daughter," Hopper replied. At that moment his eyes fell to Jane, who sat in a chair in front of the principal's desk, one hand holding a tissue to her nose, the other gripping the arm of the chair. Her glasses were askew, one side higher than the other and there were beads of perspiration on her forehead.

"The nurse said the nosebleed doesn't appear to be anything serious..." Mr. Weathers began, to which Hopper raised a hand and dismissed the man's concern, "Yeah, she gets those sometimes. I just want to know what happened."

"I'd like to know that myself, honestly," said Mr. Weathers. "There was some sort of altercation in a lab class. Two boys and Jane here involved. The boys have already been picked up by their parents. I've heard their stories but I'm interested in her side. Miss Hopper?"

Jane looked up anxiously at her name and swallowed hard. "Um, what did Mike say?"

Of course, thought Hopper, fighting the urge to roll his eyes. He'd already assumed Mike was one of the two boys involved. No shock there.

"No, it's your turn, so time to talk," Hopper directed. Jane squirmed uncomfortably.

"I will say, Chief, that it's a good thing no one was seriously hurt," the principal said. "Apparently the two boys were arguing and Jane tried to intervene. Then a burner in the lab ignited, not enough for a fire thank goodness, though no one saw any of the students tamper with it. Must have been a freak sort of accident."

"Accident, huh?" Hopper's stare focused on his daughter, who avoided his eyes. "Mr. Weathers, can we get a few minutes alone?" His tone was casual but his body language made it clear the question was rhetorical. Hopper was standing at full height, staring at the principal.

"Oh, of course, Chief, I'll go check on that lab classroom..." Mr. Weathers hurried out his own office door. Hopper shut it behind him and sat in the chair next to his daughter. He sighed and looked at her expectantly.

"Alright, spill it. Don't leave anything out."

Finally able to relax, Jane broke down crying. Hopper sighed, scooted his chair a little closer to hers, and put his arm around her. She rubbed her eyes, knocking her glasses down her nose. He reached out and carefully took them, folding them on the principal's desk. He took the discarded tissue from her hand and threw it away.

"Sssshh, Janie, it's okay. You're okay..." he comforted her. "Can you tell me what happened?"

"Don't want you to be mad at me. Or Mike," she mumbled, looking down at her lap.

"I'm not mad, honey," he reassured her. How can I be, he thought, I have no idea what you did.

She nodded and sniffed, "Troy was being really mean to Mike, Dad. He kept pushing him whenever the teacher wasn't looking. Troy is a mouth breather!"

Hopper suppressed a chuckle. "Go on. Get to the part where there was an almost fire.."

"Well, Troy kept saying mean stuff and pushing Mike. So I pushed

Troy, Then he told me to keep my freak hands off of him!"

Hopper was thinking of ways he could find to toss this bully into a cell and throw away the key, but kept his thoughts to himself.

"Then Mike tried to hit Troy, you know, because of what he'd said to me. Troy grabbed Mike and I was afraid he was really going to hurt Mike, so I screamed. I was just scared!"

"Let me guess, when you screamed, the burner on the lab table ignited, huh?" Hopper figured he should be glad no lights blew out or furniture shook. That would be harder to write off as a freak accident.

She nodded miserably. "The teacher saw Mike and Troy fighting and me screaming and sent us here. I'm really sorry!"

"I know honey. I'm not angry at you," he told her kindly. It certainly wasn't an ideal occurrence but he knew she hadn't done anything on purpose. Though he added, "I do want you to work on not losing your temper. You know what can happen when you lose control. What could you do next time?" Not that I want there to be a next time, he added in his mind.

"Tell the teacher. And take deep breaths to calm down," Jane answered immediately. Hopper nodded, "That's right."

At that moment, the office door opened and Mr. Weathers entered.

"The lab alright?" Hopper asked.

"Oh yes," Weathers replied "None of us can figure out how a burner could just light on its own though. Weirdest thing..."

Hopper decided to quickly change the subject. "Jane has something to tell you," as he nudged her.

She took the hint and cleared her throat. "I'm, uh, really sorry for screaming, And fighting. I know I'm supposed to tell the teacher." Then she added, "Troy was being a bully!"

"That's just fine, Miss Hopper. I figured that young man was the

instigator. Though I don't condone fighting in a classroom, I think we can all put this behind us." The man looked relieved and undoubtedly still perplexed at how the whole thing had happened.

"Works for me," Hopper said, rising and shaking the principal's hand, eager to get his kids and go home. He retrieved Jane's glasses and gave them to her along with a tissue to wipe the lingering tears from her face.

A few moments later, Hopper was walking toward his truck, one arm slung around Jane's shoulder, Will right behind them.

"Dad, can we get milkshakes?" Jane asked hopefully.

Her dad's eyebrows shot up. "I get called to the principal's office and you think you get a treat?!" His voice sounded stern but the twinkle in his eyes gave away his amusement.

"You said you weren't mad! Please, can we get milkshakes? I was really scared, you know..." She gave him her best sad look, complete with pout. Will snorted and disguised it as a cough.

"I suppose that could be arranged. I'd better get Joyce one too. If I don't, I'll get a lecture about ruining you kids' dinner. Somehow that doesn't bother her if I bring her one too. Sound good?" Both kids nodded and gave each other a high five.

"Bitchin'," said Jane.